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Superpowers at Bay

Beirut terrorism strikes Washington—and Moscow.

Both the United States and the Soviet Union received the same grim message in Beirut last week: that the actions of their Mideast allies can turn their diplomats into targets for terrorists. Islamic fundamentalists claimed they had murdered one of their American hostages, diplomat William Buckley—and blamed it on the Israeli strike against the PLO in Tunisia. Another group kidnapped four Soviet diplomats, then shot one of them—and blamed it on Syrian troops besieging Muslim gunmen in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli. By the end of the week the Russians had evacuated their embassy, just as the Americans did a year ago. And everyone was waiting to see how Moscow would respond to its first taste of Lebanese terrorism. "I am not surprised," said one Soviet official. "A year ago they were kidnapping the Americans and the French. I suppose the time for the Russians had to come."

Buckley, 57, had been in the hands of the shadowy Islamic Holy War organization for more than a year and a half. Last summer, when the terrorists announced that they had sentenced one of their seven American hostages to death, it was generally as-

sumed they meant Buckley, who was the only government official among the captives. That raises the possibility that Buckley may actually have been killed some time ago. Last week Islamic Holy War gave two local newspapers a few photos of a haggard-looking Buckley, along with notes saying he had been executed. But his body was no-

where to be found, and there was no independent confirmation of his death.

The Buckley announcement came only two weeks after the terrorists released another hostage, the Rev. Benjamin Weir. Five other Americans are still being held: Peter Kilburn, 60, a librarian at the American University of Beirut; the Rev. Lawrence Jenco, 50, the director of Catholic Relief Services in Lebanon; Terry Anderson, 37, a correspondent for The Associated Press; David



Buckley: Grim announcement

Jacobsen, 54, director of the American University's hospital, and Thomas Sutherland, 54, dean of its school of agriculture. Last week there also were reports that another American had been kidnapped. According to his wife, Steven Donahue of Hollywood, Fla., was seized in East Beirut while researching a book about Lebanon's drug trade. And as the hostage crisis grew more

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acute, the U.S. government sought the help of Nabih Berri's Amal group in contacting the kidnappers.

The Soviet diplomats were seized according to a familiar script. First, gunmen grabbed embassy cultural officer Arkady Katkov, press attaché Oleg Spirin, commercial attaché Valery Mirkov and embassy doctor Nikolai Svirsky at gunpoint in West Beirut. Next, a spokesman for a hitherto unknown group called the Islamic Liberation Organization phoned Western news agencies. The caller warned that "the death sentence will be carried out very soon" if Moscow failed to "stop the annihilation of Muslims in Tripoli through Soviet tanks and artillery." The terrorists then released photos of the four Soviets with guns pointed to their heads. The next day Katkov's bullet-riddled body was found near Beirut's sports stadium.

After Katkov's murder a second caller from the Islamic Liberation Organization threatened to blow up the Soviet Embassy if all of Moscow's diplomats didn't clear out of the country. In the past, Lebanese militiamen had launched only occasional minor rocket attacks against the heavily guarded Soviet compound. But the Soviets took the threat seriously—perhaps mindful of the two suicide car-bomb attacks on U.S. Embassy facilities in Beirut. Three buses carrying an estimated 100 to 135 Soviets drove off, escorted by 150 pro-Moscow Druse militiamen who used Soviet-built T-54 tanks to block approaches to the embassy. The bus drivers said they were headed for Damascus via the Druse-controlled Shouf mountains.

Search Effort: As the Soviets were leaving, a cease-fire was being negotiated in Tripoli. With an Iranian delegation serving as an intermediary, Syrian President Hafez Assad and Muslim leader Sheik Saed Shaaban agreed to stop the fighting, which had lasted 19 days and left more than 500 people dead and 1,100 wounded. The truce appeared to meet the primary condition for the release of the remaining Soviet hostages. But at the weekend their fate remained uncertain. A handful of Soviet diplomats and Lebanese authorities directed a search effort from a joint-operations room in Beirut. And prodded by Moscow, Assad met with leaders of the Hizbollah and other Shiite fundamentalist groups and warned them against attacks on Russians. But Soviet officials were experiencing the same frustrations that Western diplomats in Lebanon have come to know only too well. "It's difficult," said one Soviet official. "You have so many parties and

organizations in Lebanon. We are dealing with a fanatic Muslim group."

Moscow was also learning the costs of meddling in Lebanon. Since the failure of the U.S.-sponsored peace agreement between Israel and Lebanon two years ago, the Soviets and their Syrian allies have played an increasingly prominent role in Lebanon's affairs. In June Assad visited Moscow to coordinate policy. The Soviets

mands. In recent months the Kremlin has also stepped up its rhetorical support for Syria's presence in Lebanon. But that has only fueled anti-Soviet sentiment among Lebanese Sunni Muslim factions fighting Syrian and Syrian-backed forces.

In the immediate aftermath of the kidnapping the Kremlin responded coolly. Soviet officials consulted with Assad and with Lebanese President Amin Gemayel, but didn't appear to place direct pressure on either of them to win release of the hostages. They also made no move to mobilize the Soviet fleet standing off the coast of Libya. But in an official broadcast in Moscow, the Kremlin warned ominously that "procrastination... let alone violence against Soviet citizens will further aggravate the guilt of all those who have anything to do with this matter." Leonid Zamyatin, a spokesman traveling with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in Paris, said only that the Kremlin was doing "everything possible" to "protect its Soviet citizens in Lebanon." But if Gorbachev does decide to retaliate, he won't have to deal with two obstacles that have stayed Ronald Reagan's hand in Lebanon: Congress and public opinion. For the moment, the Soviet hostage crisis offered one clear lesson—that terrorism is no longer an epidemic that plagues Western nations alone.

"The Soviets have been dismissive of the problems with terrorists we've had in the past," said one senior Western diplomat in Moscow. "I can only hope this will make them more aware of the problem."

ROD NORDLAND in Beirut



On the firing line in Tripoli: Nineteen days of bloodshed—and an 11th-hour truce



Katkov (top left) and the other Soviet hostages: Deadly threat

apparently put pressure on him to rein in Syrian-supported Palestinian radicals who were challenging PLO leader Yasir Arafat. Since Arafat has become associated with Jordan's recent peace initiative, however, Moscow seems to have dropped those de-